Traits of an Academic

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So, you want to be an academic!

- Here, thoughts and ideas to be presented are entirely my own.
- Backdrop- long years of experience in academia and industry.
- Also, networking with academics around the world.
- Not all traits listed can be present in every academic (except in a super-academic!)-they are listed for an Ideal Academic.
Typical Tasks of an Academic

- Teaching
- Research - primarily initiation/supervision
- Service - to Department, Faculty, University, Society, Profession, and Industry/Business

*Distribution of time/effort between above depends on institutional culture and seniority of individual*
Important Traits

- Willingness to work very hard with not-so-attractive compensation: nine-to-five syndrome is a recipe for failure in academia.
- Common misconception among the lay people is that academics have a “cozy” job—far from it in most major institutions!
- Remember that practically the whole world will judge your performance as an academic!
- Your record is public information and accessible to any one who wishes to have access!
Important qualities required

- Ability to be self-critical, accept external criticism and be creatively destructive and innovative
- Dislike of status quo is key to innovation in teaching, research and service
- Must recognize time-dependence of research results, teaching/learning technologies
- Must be able to think productively, creatively and critically
- Willingness to share 100% of knowledge with others without reservation
More on Important Qualities

- Must have vision, which should be pursued with missionary zeal
- Accept change enthusiastically but wisely
- Be enterprising, creative, innovative
- Must have students’ welfare in mind at all times
- Must be selfless, open-minded and aware of multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural aspects in education and research
Qualities (contd)

- Must keep abreast of current literature on pedagogy, instructional technology, and research in areas of interest
- Must have breadth in research area and depth in sub-areas (a recognized expert!)
- Must be a leader and not follower
- Must be able to impart leadership skills
- Have excellent oral/written communication skills
- Must inspire confidence and enthusiasm in students under tutelage
Qualities (Contd -2)

- Must be a team player
- Must think globally but able to act locally
- Must be an excellent role model
- Must be able to develop a network of peers
- Must enjoy difficult tasks and assignments and carry them out with real enthusiasm
- Must focus on quality at all times
Qualities needed for success

- Excellent inter-personal skills
- Ability to interface with students, peers, academic and industrial colleagues
- Genuine desire to make lasting contributions to students’ careers, institutional visibility and profession on an international scale
- Willingness if required to sacrifice personal gains in some instances
Qualities required—cont'd

- Academics must uphold highest ethical standards—also must become role models
- Must not hold bias of any kind
- Must have logical mind, strong motivation
- Must develop critical thinking skills while being creative at all times and in all tasks—teaching, research or service
- Must possess a global outlook
- Must take pride in peers’ and students’ success as a measure of own accomplishment
Ethics- a key issue

- Increased global competition can lead to temptation to employ undesirable means to succeed superficially- highly undesirable trait!
- Ethical behavior is a must in teaching, research and service
- Always give due credit, never claim credit for others’ work (present or prior, here or elsewhere!)
- Ethics can make or break a career!
A list of desirable traits for an Ideal Academic!

- This list is very broad and long - not all academics or academics-to-be can possess all desired traits. Aim to have as many as possible!
- Possesses: Resourcefulness, initiative, keen interest and motivation, deep and current knowledge of field, self-learning ability etc.
- Attracts respect of peers and students, values time, makes contributions to institution, profession, society etc.
- Is committed, hardworking, excellent communicator, leader not follower, a desirable team member, etc.
How can one measure academic success?

- No magic measurement scale accepted universally!
- You know it when you see it!
- Highly subjective judgment – based on objective criteria commonly listed by institutions
- Various criteria for teaching, research and service contributions- a weighted average is what really counts. Different institutions give different weights to each- best to try to excel in all
- Difficult but feasible!
- See websites of well known institutions and visit criteria for promotion and tenure for details!
Some criteria of success

- Each individual may have a different list – basically must meet one’s own criteria first!
- Teaching: Student and peer evaluations, past students’ performance, authorship of texts etc
- Research: More obvious: publications in archival peer reviewed journals, international conferences, invitations to give keynotes, plenary lectures, seminars, workshops, consult etc, editorships, monographs, handbooks, patents, international awards of recognition etc, international profile and recognition - focus on quality and not quantity. Professional performance of past research students.
- Above list is not all-inclusive
Closing Remarks

- Presents some personal viewpoints on what an ideal and real academic should be like.
- No one is a superman—don’t expect all qualities in one individual.
- Some qualities are absolutely necessary e.g. ethical, willingness to work hard, good communication skills etc. Others are highly desirable.
- Some traits must pre-exist prior to taking up an academic position; others will follow with good mentorship and commitment to excellence.
- Good academic environment must be provided by institutions if they wish to excel themselves. Academics make the institution!
Some traits of an Ideal Researcher/Research Student

- Many of the same characteristics expected of an academic are also desirable for an ideal researcher/research student
- Not all traits can be found in one individual
- Some are prerequisites, some are co-requisites while others must develop under proper mentorship of an Ideal Mentor!
Some desirable traits- A list

- Has initiative
- Is resourceful
- Is motivated
- Is self-starter
- Is self-learner
- Is logical
- Is ethical
- Is critical in thinking processes
List of positive attributes desired

- Is aware of current state-of-the-art
- Is eager to learn and know more!
- Is cooperative, team player
- Has ability to think independently
- Is analytical
- Has good experimental skills
- Has good oral/written communication skills
- Is sincere, conscientious
List (cont)

- Is not risk-averse
- Wants to contribute to knowledge, make a difference
- Hard-working, curious
- Patient
- Has global outlook
- Likes to network

- Note: Some attributes develop with maturity as researcher
Thank you!

- ANY QUESTIONS?